

Voters First Advisory Commission

Public Hearing

Monday, August 6, 2007

Warwick Public Library, 600 Sandy Lane, Warwick, RI

Commission Members Present:

Secretary of State A. Ralph Mollis

Senator June Gibbs

Ken McGill, Pawtucket Board of Canvassers

Bob Rapoza, RI Board of Elections (for Director Bob Kando)

Jan Ruggiero, Director, Secretary of State's Elections Division

Staff Members Present:

Paul Caranci, Deputy Secretary of State

Mark Welch, Esq., Legal Counsel

Pam Lombardi, Administrative Assistant

Chris Barnett, Communications Director

Bob Graziano, Advance Secretary

Rob Rock, Elections Division

General Public Present:

49 public members in attendance

Summary of Hearing:

Chairman Mollis opened the hearing at 6:47 P.M. with an explanation

of the purpose of the hearing, an explanation of the 10-point reform program, an introduction of the Commissioners, notice of the last remaining hearing date and location and an explanation of how to reach the Commission with comments.

In addition, Chairman Mollis provided the rules under which the hearing would be conducted.

Finally, Chairman Mollis introduced Warwick Mayor Scott Avedisian, who gave the greetings of the City and recognized Rep. Patricia Serpa of Warwick, West Warwick & Coventry, Warwick City Councilwoman Helen Taylor, Board of Canvassers members Joe Gallucci, Lorraine McDonald, Janet Cragan, Dottie McCarthy and Nancy Parent, and Cranston City Councilman Alan Fung, all of whom attended the hearing.

Richard Gaffney – President of the National Federation of the Blind of RI

· In the election of 2006 he was optimistic that people with vision impairments would be able to vote without assistance like everyone else, but 1 in 5 Automark machines failed. Would like to see the issue resolved by next election.

Chairman Mollis noted that he and his staff met with representative of Automark in January and were assured that the issues are being corrected and that the Automark will be available in time for the 2008 elections.

Almas Kalafian – Retired Providence English and Civics teacher

- Interested in the expansion of the poll worker force. Should tap into civic-minded teenagers like Boy & Girl Scouts, Explorers, etc. These groups go up to age 18 or more and younger people are more comfortable with technology.

- Would like to see Automark machine in all city and town halls for early voting.

Commissioner McGill noted that a bill had been introduced to allow 16 and 17 year olds to serve as poll workers.

Commissioner Ken McGill- Bill introduced allowing 17 yr olds to work the polls has been passed by the General Assembly. Certain GPA must be sustained by the student.

Lorna Ricci – Executive Director of the Ocean State Center for Independent Living

- Need to address access issues. She is acutely aware of access issues because she works with people with disabilities.

- Regarding the Automark machine, we must find a way to address the mechanical issues as well as the issue of transporting such sensitive equipment.

- Poll workers are sometimes technically challenged. Need to address that.

- Mandate that all poll workers vote using the Automark machine to ensure they know how to use it. They will then understand the glitches and this will take care of ballot error. It will help with poll workers' comfort level. One poll worker said to her “you’re kidding,

you don't really want to use it (Automark)? This could have deterred a more timid person from voting.

- Favors voting over a 2-3 day period.**
- Expand pool of poll workers. Prefers having non-voting age youth at polls for technical support, but not as actual poll workers. Use College students for that purpose.**
- She witnessed 2 people leave a poll because they couldn't stand in line that long.**

Linda Ward – Executive Director of Opportunities Unlimited.

- She called Dept. of Health, which said it does not transmit death notices to Secretary of State electronically, it is done by paper.**
- Should also get Registry to notify Secretary of State when people change addresses.**
- People may see photo ID as a deterrent to voting.**
- Bus transportation to the polls should be free.**
- All poll workers should receive training in elder sensitivity for better public service.**
- Automark should work. People who need that machine shouldn't be forced to vote with assistance.**
- Referred to minutes of 6/18/07 mtg. Statement made by Bob Kando that voters with disabilities can have someone help them sign.**

Joe Burnstein –

- 21 year INS Agent – border patrol.**
- People who are not citizens do vote. In Chicago in the 1980 where he worked, there were thousands of undocumented immigrants voting using stolen or counterfeit birth certificates.**
- We need a basis to determine citizenship. Everyone in RI should be re-registered to vote. During this process, require a birth certificate, the ID page on a passport, consulate USD passport or USCID Card issued to naturalized citizens. These are the only valid ID's that should be used. Driver's licenses or Registry ID's are obtained easily by students, resident aliens, etc. They can drive, but are not allowed to vote. Other forms such as the N400 or the N600 are good but cannot be legally copied. Can put the serial number from these documents on the Registration Card. At the bottom of the re-registration card have a sworn statement such as the 18USC 4001 or 1001 in which lying is a felony.**
- The State has no authority to allow non-citizens to vote.**
- Refer any violations to the US Attorney.**

Terry Gorman – RI Immigration Law Enforcement

- (At a previous hearing) Senator Pichardo challenged him on whether reading, writing and understanding English was a requirement of citizenship at the last hearing. Terry misspoke it is not a requirement.**
- Questions the way the government arrives at the figures that determine if enough minorities reside in an area to warrant Spanish**

ballots. Should be 5% of voting population.

- Must show proof of residency to vote. Should be in bold print on the registration card.**

Commissioner Ruggiero noted that the 5% figure comes to us from the Census Bureau through the Department of Justice. They issue a mandate on what will be required in Spanish if the population reaches a certain level. Spanish was required in Central Falls in the 2000 election and in Central Falls and Providence after the 2000 election.

Paul McNeil – Board of Trustees of the Warwick Library

- Has been circulating nomination papers since 1964 on behalf of candidates and feels it will be easier if all signatures could be obtained on one form instead of having separate forms for each City and Town. This is done in New Jersey.**

- Elections on weekends would be difficult. In Westerly and Hopkinton you can't hold elections on Saturday because there is a large population of 7th Day Adventists. The Jewish population may also object.**

- Third party members had a hard time getting poll workers approved.**

Christine Harkins – Kent House Counseling Center (Alcohol, gambling and family violence issues.)

- Their group supported the right of felons to vote after release from prison.**

- Agrees with all the proposals presented by the Commission.**

- Weekend voting would be especially helpful for elderly and disabled**

people.

- There should be a signer at polling places for hearing disabled. Can't ask questions otherwise. Can have interpreter at town hall since this is their native language.
- Political ads should be captioned and signed.

Laurie Robertson –

- Has mobility problem due to MS.
- When she votes, the handicap ramp actually starts the entrance to her polling place. People should be 50' from that point.
- The ramp adds distance to the entrance so it becomes more than the required 200' from the handicap parking spaces.
- Automark was turned in opposite direction than all other booths. She had to go around it with her walker and it was very tight. Other voters were also trying to feed their ballots into the Automark machine instead of the scanner.

Buddy Tassoni –

- Question # 9 should be expanded to read "Proof of Residency, Citizenship and Documentation."
- Absentee ballots are mailed out so we are not able to prove citizenship.
- One day of voting is plenty. If we have 3 days, people will try to vote 3 times.
- If someone needs assistance to vote, a member of each party should provide it.

Alan Fung – Former Cranston Councilman

- Supports many proposals listed.**
- Weekend voting may have a prohibitive cost and should be studied further.**
- Minors should be allowed to work at polls. They would feel more engaged in process.**
- Should be a uniform system of voter roll cleanup. He was still registered in Providence where he lived when he was 18. This creates opportunity for fraud.**
- Supports proof of residency and photo ID.**
- Expand no canvassing zone. Residential locations (Senior housing complexes) are problematic.**
- Need more poll worker training in the week prior to election. Increase compensation.**
- Integrity of election must be maintained during recounts by counting all ballots.**

Buddy Guy –

- Interested in the law that says only citizens can vote.**
- If we don't follow the law, process is a joke.**

Rolfe Gjertsen –

- Wants better privacy at voting booth.**
- Put photo of candidates on ballots.**

Karen Gorman –

- Spend the next Election Day observing to better understand problems.**
- Should promote mock voting in schools.**

Almas Kalafian –

- Poll workers' job has become very complex. Hysteria breaks out every time she walks in a polling place.**
- Poll workers who are older may be unable to adapt to the new way of voting. Need to concentrate on filling these voids. Explorers are up to 21yrs old/Eagle Scouts and Gold Girl Scouts should be considered to work the polls.**

Richard Gaffney -

- Board of Elections policy of not allowing anyone who is not disabled to use the Automark machine should be changed. HAVA requires an Automark at each polling place, not just at city hall.**

Buddy Guy –

- Republican party (in a Providence ward) had no poll workers at a poll because the Chairman didn't hand in any names.**

Julia Howarth –

- Came to this Country as a permanent illegal resident. Married an American. Had to sign papers making family responsible for any expenses she couldn't afford. Why has that stopped? Only legal**

residents should vote.

Charles Sturtevant – Common Cause Board Member

- The Voters First hearing process is excellent for the State.**
- Disagrees with photo ID. Illegal voting is rare and more of a myth than reality.**
- Only citizens should vote.**
- Real problem is that Americans are apathetic.**

Jeff Christie –

- Voter registration forms should be available in Braille.**

Leo Garrity –

- Voter apathy needs to change.**

Antonette Sicard –

- Voter roll cleanup should be #1 proposal. There are many sources available to do this, and if it's done, all the other proposals will fall into place.**

Chairman Mollis gave closing remarks and adjourned the hearing at 8:32 P.M.

The next public hearing is scheduled for Monday, August 20th at URI's Kingston campus beginning at 6:30 P.M. Subcommittees will

organize before the next meeting.